

# Summary of Striving Readers Projects:

## Profile of San Diego Unified School District's Striving Readers Project and Evaluation

---

**Grantee:** San Diego Unified School District, Office of Instructional Support

**Project Director:** Rosemary Staley, Ph.D.

**Local Evaluator:** University of California San Diego

**Principal Investigator:** Carolyn Huie Hofstetter, Ph.D.

### Setting

The San Diego Unified School District Striving Readers project is being implemented in four high schools, two of which are small schools in a larger high school complex, and the four middle schools that feed into them.<sup>1</sup> The district serves approximately 138,000 students in 187 schools, making it the eighth largest school district in the nation. In the study schools, 64 percent of students are eligible for free and reduced priced lunch, 39 percent are Hispanic and 16 percent are African American, and 22 percent are identified as English Language Learners.

### Intervention Models

---

#### Targeted Intervention

**Classroom Model as Planned:** *Strategies for Literacy Independence across the Curriculum model (SLIC)* is a professional development-based model developed by T. McDonald & C. Thornley, Education Associates in New Zealand, which presents students with a set of literacy strategies to enhance skills in reading and writing. SLIC is based on the theory that comprehension of text requires understanding the ways text forms present particular types of information and how surface features of text (e.g., titles, subtitles, captions, font style, graphics) convey information about meaning. It therefore is designed to teach students strategic reading behaviors such as cross-checking text features and running text to verify understanding, using contextual clues to understand new vocabulary, note-making/other forms of writing to organize text information from readings, and breaking writing prompts into component questions. Students are assumed to gradually build independence in using these through scaffolded instruction and independent reading and writing practice. SLIC uses expository, narrative, and persuasive text, including textbooks, novels, short stories, and magazines that are either provided by the developer or selected by teacher. The program includes periodic administrations (every 2-3 months) of students using an assessment tool aligned with SLIC, the BEAR Literacy Assessment System, which was developed jointly by SLIC developers, San Diego Unified School District, and UC Berkeley/BEAR.

**Professional Development Model as Planned:** SLIC involves extensive professional development for teachers. The program includes a two-day introductory workshop, three all-day follow-up training sessions, monthly meetings with district staff and teachers to discuss

---

<sup>1</sup> In Year 1 of the project (2006-07), there were 3 high schools and 2 middle schools.

implementation, and four rounds of discussions between teachers and developers that last between 3 and 4 days per school. Together, these activities total approximately 200 hours of professional development time per teacher. In addition, on-site school literacy coaches are available for daily in-class support and district staff and program consultants provide regular monitoring and support approximately two days a month per school. The same level of professional development activities continues throughout the implementation of SLIC.

**Context for Implementation:** SLIC is being implemented in middle schools and high schools for students in grades 7-10, as a supplement to the regular English Language Arts classes. SLIC replaces an hour-long elective course for students in treatment schools. Students are eligible for SLIC if they are two years below grade level as measured by the Degrees of Reading Power (DRP) assessment at the end of the prior school year, are reading at a 'basic' level or below as measured by the California Standards Test—English Language Arts score, or are labeled 'intermediate' or below on the California English Language Development Test (CELDT). Struggling readers can continue to receive SLIC for up to four years. In the first year of the program, SLIC was implemented in two high schools and 3 middle schools, in grades 7 and 9. In the second year (2007-08), SLIC was implemented in 4 middle schools and 4 high schools. In Year 2 of implementation, students were served in grades 7 and 8 in the middle schools and grades 9 and 10 in the high schools. Altogether, in grades 7-10, approximately 600 students were assigned to SLIC classes. The targeted intervention will be implemented for a total of four years.<sup>2</sup>

## **Whole School Intervention**

**Classroom Model as Planned:** The whole-school intervention is based on the same SLIC literacy strategies used in the targeted intervention. The SLIC developer provides professional development to content-area teachers in teaching the literacy strategies. The whole school professional development is introduced gradually to content-area teachers, to build momentum and increase teacher buy-in. Priority is given to teachers serving students who are also attending the SLIC supplemental classes and to those teachers who express the most interest in being trained. The program is intended for teachers in all content areas.

**Professional Development Model as Planned:** The content area teachers who implementing SLIC as a whole school model are offered approximately 25 hours of professional development. This includes 15 to 20 hours of conferences on the whole school program for teachers from all content areas and another 8 hours of smaller group seminars for teachers in the same content areas. In addition, the on-site literacy coaches provide individual in-class support to teachers on an as-needed basis. The same level of professional development activities continues throughout the implementation of SLIC.

**Context for Implementation:** For the whole school intervention, SLIC is being implemented by all content teachers in the treatment schools (4 middle schools and 4 high schools starting in Year 2 of implementation). Altogether, in grades 6-12, approximately 6,300 students are being

---

<sup>2</sup> San Diego Unified School District will implement the targeted intervention for a total of four years, but only three years will be included in the evaluation.

taught by content teachers trained in SLICs. The whole school intervention will be implemented for a total of four years.

## Evaluation Design

---

### Evaluation of the Targeted Intervention

#### Research Questions:

1. Will struggling readers assigned to the SLIC targeted intervention class improve their literacy outcomes, as measured by standardized tests and the project monitoring (SLIC) assessment, significantly more than struggling readers who do not receive the SLIC targeted intervention but who do receive the SLIC whole school intervention?
2. Will students in the SLIC intervention group be more likely to read at grade level, pass the California High School Exit Exam in tenth-grade, enroll and successfully complete AP classes in eleventh/twelfth-grades, graduate from high school, and enroll in college than SLIC-eligible students who do not receive the SLIC targeted intervention but who do receive the SLIC whole school intervention?
3. Will struggling readers classified as English Learners in the SLIC intervention class improve their literacy outcomes compared to those classified as English Learners who do not receive the SLIC targeted intervention but receive the SLIC whole school intervention?

**Research Design and Methods:** In the second year of the program, eligible incoming seventh and ninth grade students were randomly assigned to participate in the SLIC intervention class or a regular elective class.<sup>3</sup> Both treatment and control students also participate in the regular language arts class as well as receive instruction from teachers trained as part of the whole school intervention. New cohorts of students in grades 7-10 will be randomized in each of the first three years of the study. Treatment group students who continue to read at least two years behind grade level can receive the targeted intervention for up to four years (through tenth grade).

**Control Condition:** Students in the control condition participate in their regular elective classes, regular language arts classes, and receive instruction from teachers trained as part of the whole school intervention.

**Sample Size:** Across Years 1 and 2 of implementation, on the CST, in the 4 middle schools, the evaluation included 318 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade treatment students and 339 control students. In the 4 high schools, the evaluation included 255 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade treatment students and 291 control students.

#### Key Measures of Student Reading Outcomes (Source):

Degrees of Reading Power (DRP) – reading comprehension (External Test Publisher)  
California Standards Test (CST) (State Test)

---

<sup>3</sup> Due to difficulties implementing random assignment in the 2006-07 school year, this year was considered a pilot year and was subsequently excluded from the evaluation. Therefore, the first school year of implementation is 2006-07 while the first school year of the evaluation is 2007-08.

## Evaluation of the Whole School Intervention

### Research Questions:

1. Will students attending schools that implemented both the whole school and targeted components of the SLIC intervention program demonstrate more improvement in literacy skills, as measured by student scores on standardized assessments, than will students attending comparison schools that did not implement either component?
2. Will the outcomes of students in schools that implemented both the whole school and targeted components of the SLIC intervention program improve more each year over the course of the study, than will the outcomes of students attending comparison schools that did not implement either component?

**Research Design and Methods:** An interrupted time series approach with a comparison group will be used to examine reading and other academic outcomes for all students in treatment and comparison schools before and after the implementation of SLIC.

Future evaluation reports will include findings on the impact of the whole school intervention on student achievement. The interrupted time series evaluation design is made more rigorous with the inclusion of more than two years of post-implementation data and comparison schools.

**Comparison Group:** The evaluation includes a set of 8 similar comparison schools that are not implementing the SLIC model and instead are using the district's regular language arts program. All students in both the treatment and comparison groups of schools are included in the evaluation of the whole school intervention.

### Key Measures of Student Reading Outcomes (Source):

Degrees of Reading Power (DRP) (External Test Publisher)

California Standards Test (CST) (State Test)

California English Language Development Test (CELDT) (State Test)

CAHSEE standardized tests (State Test)

## Year 2 Evaluation Findings

---

### Targeted Intervention

**Fidelity of Implementation of the Targeted Intervention Model:** In terms of fidelity of implementation of the *professional development model*, in the first year of implementation, 60% of the schools were at a high level of teacher participation in the professional development training. Sixty per cent of the schools had a high level of implementation of the coach-to-teacher support. In the second year of implementation, the overall level of fidelity declined, with no schools at a high level of participation in the teacher professional development and 13% of schools at a high level of implementation of teacher-to-coach support.

The fidelity of implementation of the *classroom model* was not calculated for the first year of the program. In Year 2 of implementation, none of the schools reached a high level of fidelity of implementation (although all of the schools were at a medium level of fidelity).

**Impact of the Targeted Interventions on Student Reading Outcomes:** After one year of intervention, there were no significant impacts on the reading achievement of middle school

or high school struggling readers, except for a significant effect size of .15 for high school students on DRP. The non-significant effect size for middle school and high school students on the California Standards Test is .05 and .06, respectively. The non-significant effect size for middle school students on DRP was .03. There were no significant impacts on the reading achievement of the English Language Learners in the sample.

## **Whole School Intervention**

**Fidelity of Implementation of the Whole School Intervention Model:** In terms of fidelity of implementation of the *professional development model*, in the first and second years of implementation, no school reached a high level of total participation of teachers either in the professional development training or the coaching support.

## **Summary of the Strengths and Weaknesses of the Impact Evaluation of the Targeted Intervention:**

### **Strengths**

- Eligibility for random assignment was determined systematically, using a predetermined cutoff score on one of three tests of reading achievement (CA Standards Test- English Language Arts (CST-ELA), CA English Language Development Test (CELDT) or Degrees of Reading Power (DRP)).
- Random assignment was faithfully executed in Year 2 of the study, and estimated impacts are based only on data collected in Year 2. The authors report there were 29 students in the control condition who received the intervention, and 123 students randomized to the treatment who did not receive it. This represents a minimal amount of crossover.
- There is no evidence that there are other factors (e.g., other reading programs or district policies) that were implemented in ways that would undermine the evaluators' ability to attribute impacts to Read 180.
- The evaluation employs two reading tests as outcome measures. The first (CST-ELA) assesses English and language arts, and was developed by the state. The second (DRP) assesses comprehension, and was developed by an external test publisher. There is no reason to believe that students assigned to the treatment group have more experience taking the tests than do the control group students, or that the tests measures skills specific to the intervention, both of which could undermine confidence in the impact estimates.
- When estimating impacts, appropriate analytic steps were taken to account for the clustering of students within schools.

### **Weaknesses**

- While the overall number of students unable to participate in follow-up data collection was low (15% and 16.8% for the CST and DRP respectively), the rate of attrition differs across the treatment and control groups. The 11 percentage point difference in the attrition rate is considered high by convention, suggesting that the treatment and control

- The year two evaluation report, which includes findings from the first two years of implementation, includes a sample of students large enough to detect an impact (in standard deviation units) of the intervention on reading achievement equivalent to .17 on the CST-ELA and .18 on the DRP for grades 7-8, and .12 on the CST-ELA and .21 on the DRP for grades 9-10.<sup>4</sup> Because San Diego plans to offer the intervention to new groups of students for three school years, future reports will have larger sample sizes and be able to detect smaller impacts.<sup>5</sup> In addition, future reports will be able to examine the impact of a student remaining in the targeted intervention for two or three years, which one might hypothesize would be higher than the impact of one year of the intervention.

---

<sup>4</sup> Abt Associates staff calculated the MDE by multiplying the standard error of the impact estimate by 2.8. This calculation produces the MDE for a two-tailed test with 80% power, and with an alpha level of .05, and accounts for clustering and for the inclusion of the covariates in the model.

<sup>5</sup> San Diego plans to implement the targeted intervention for a total of four school years, but only three years will be included in the evaluation.